



SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS NEED COACHES TOO

Joseph C. Santora and Gil Bozer explain how coaching helps develop the skills of social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs seek to improve society by discovering, creating and exploiting untried commercial opportunities to address pressing social problems.¹ Given decreased spending by governments and corporations on social sector initiatives, and the resulting mandate to ‘do more with less’, social entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important trend in the non-profit world. Often described as highly driven and highly motivated, social entrepreneurs aim to create self-sufficient organisations.² However, as well-intentioned as they may be, they frequently work in highly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, and frequently lack the business expertise, knowledge and skills required to create socially effective organisations which are financially successful and self-sufficient. In addition, they may be stymied by excessive regulations and by the challenge of liaising with various stakeholders with conflicting interests. All of this raises an important question: is there a way for social entrepreneurs to become more knowledgeable and skilful about business affairs, apply an entrepreneur mindset, acquire necessary leadership competencies and still remain loyal to their social mission?

ENTREPRENEURIAL COACHING TO THE RESCUE

Executive coaching has the potential to enable social entrepreneurs to remain true to their mission while simultaneously developing self-sufficient social organisations.³ The Outsider-Insider coaching model has been successful in helping social entrepreneurs create meaningful social value for their organisations. Essentially, in this model outsiders – those not employed by the organisation or affiliated with it in any way – become insiders, coaching and advising executive directors on entrepreneurial issues. These individuals, typically executives from other companies, work closely with social entrepreneurs in three ways. First, to hone social entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics. Second, they coach social entrepreneurs to reconcile practical organisational philosophies and issues, such as ‘mission drift’ and strategic planning, by guiding and sharing business experiences and insights and applying them to social organisations. Third, they become sounding boards to help social entrepreneurs with self-reflection, professional demands and leadership exploration issues.

* Mission drift describes the process where a non-profit organisation either finds that it has moved away from its original aim or the organisation consciously moves into a new direction from its mission statement.

** Based on the first author’s consultancies with many non-profit leaders turned social entrepreneurs.

THE BUSINESS COACHING CONSULTANT MODEL IN ACTION

The Outsider-Insider coaching model thus makes use of business executives who want to 'give back' to the community. One component is the executive-in-residence (EIR), which is based on the idea of an executive loan from a company with a social conscience. The EIR's résumé may include leadership experiences – from project development to leading small- and large-scale entrepreneurial initiatives." The EIR's main coaching responsibilities involve working with and advising the social entrepreneur on best practices for entrepreneurial initiatives. Often, the on-loan EIR is paid by their company, works a normal week during the engagement with the host social entrepreneurial organisation, becomes integrally involved in the direct administrative and other work activities, and focuses their attention on coaching and developing those business skills the social entrepreneur needs most. The timetable for such coaching arrangements may last as long as one year, although they normally last about six months, with the executive returning to a previous or new position in the home company.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Social entrepreneurship continues to be an important way to transform social sector organisations significantly, to better the lives of their constituents, to increase self-sufficiency, and to reduce reliance on government and other donor financial support in a severely tough economic environment. Entrepreneurial coaching is proposed as an effective practice for social entrepreneurs' development, and has proven highly effective in various settings (see *Seeds of success*).

Coaching can undoubtedly at times drive social entrepreneurs out of their comfort zones by forcing them to deal with difficult questions. However, if handled in a holistic way, it can be highly valuable in developing and implementing successful social entrepreneurial initiatives. Hence, the coach and the social entrepreneur working in tandem can create an effective social organisation for stakeholders.

Further reading

Bornstein, D. (2007). *How to change the world*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Jackson, B., Nicoll, M., & Roy, M. J. (2018). The distinctive challenges and opportunities for creating leadership within social enterprises. *Social Enterprise Journal* 14(1), 71–91.

Prabhu, G. N. (1999). Social entrepreneurial leadership. *Career Development International* 4(3), 140–145.

References

1. Light, P. C. (2006). Reshaping social entrepreneurship. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall, 47–51. This article provides several views of social entrepreneurs.
2. Weisbrod, B. A. (ed). (1998). *To profit or not to profit: The commercial transformation of the nonprofit sector*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
3. Stockdale, S. (2018). How transformational coaching changes leaders, who in turn can change the world. *Coaching Perspectives*, July. See pages 6-10 for a discussion of a transformational coaching model that may be used with leaders in the social sector.

SEEDS OF SUCCESS

Several years ago, a retired real estate executive volunteered to work with, and coach, a non-profit social entrepreneur in his attempt to launch a for-profit real estate company. The purpose of the company was to purchase and rehabilitate apartment buildings and abandoned multiple-dwelling housing units and to then lease these dwellings to his constituents or to sell them on the open, competitive market. This initiative resulted in supplying housing to organisational constituents at significantly reduced rental fees, creating various employment opportunities for constituents as real estate agents or brokers and in the construction industry, as well as improving and beautifying the local neighbourhood and environment. The selling of rehabilitated houses and apartments and the reinvesting of profits into the non-profit organisation reduced resource dependency on external institutions and government agencies, plus promoted self-sufficiency.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr Joseph C. Santora is at Hult International Business School, Berkhamsted, UK. Areas of interest include non-profits, executive succession, family business, leadership, high-potentials and coaching. He has consulted with several organisations on these topics and has written some 200 articles, cases and reviews, in addition to presenting papers at international conferences in seventeen countries and on four continents. He is the founder and editor of the *International Leadership Journal*.

joseph.santora@ashridge.hult.edu



Dr Gil Bozer is a workplace coaching researcher, senior lecturer and consultant. Gil's areas of expertise include workplace coaching, leadership, talent development and executive succession. Gil is on the faculty at Sapir Academic College in Israel. Gil had taught in executive education, MBA, DBA, PhD and corporate training programmes. He has presented at many international conferences and been published in a variety of academic and practitioner journals and books.

gilbotzer@gmail.com